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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ἐὶς τὸν δοθῆνα αὐτῇ γὰρ ἡράουσι, αὐτοὶ γινώσκουσιν αὐτὴν ὡς ἀγαπᾷ θεοῦ τοῦ να βᾶοιμις.

Luke ii. 14.

PUBLISHED THE MIDDLE OF EVERY MONTH, AT 9, UPPER SACKVILLE-STREET, DUBLIN.

Vol. III.—No. 27.

MARCH, 1854.

Annual Subscription, 3s. 6d.
Payable in Advance.

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DOES THE VISIBLE CHURCH NEVER CORRUPT THE TRUE DOCTRINE?

THERE has been latterly a good deal of correspondence in our pages to prove the visibility of the Church—a doctrine which yet we have never meant to deny. The argument has, however, had the effect of developing the true differences between us and our correspondents; and it has turned out that the only point we really disagree on is, not the *visibility* of the Church, but its constant *purity* in doctrine. Christianity has always visibly existed since its establishment, patent to the eyes of the world; we believe that it will never cease to so exist—that the gates of death or destruction will never prevail against it; but we do not hold, with our Roman Catholic correspondents, that the Christianity which is thus visible has been, or will be, always free from errors in doctrine.

Nor can we admit, with them, that a Church necessarily ceases to be the visible Church of Christ—or a part of it—only because it adds to the essential tenets of our faith others that are erroneous, or because some mistaken or conflicting opinions prevail amongst its members.

The question has most properly been argued on an authority which we both believe to be inspired, that of the Sacred Scriptures; and it is, therefore, worth while to observe what account they give of this matter, either as historic facts, or by way of prophetic warning. The writings of the New Testament are spread over nearly the first century, when Christianity had the benefit of being taught by living infallible guides, and when, therefore, if infallible guides could ever guard against error, we might expect a perfect visible Church, and a complete exemption from heresies. Yet, what is the account given by the inspired historians? Even before the ascension of our Lord we find a false tradition accepted amongst the brethren—namely, that St. John was not to die.—John xxi. 23. The very Divinity of Christ was denied.—Jude 4. The cardinal doctrine of the Resurrection was questioned.—1 Cor. xv. 12. Many "false prophets were gone into the world."—1 John, iv. 1.* St. Paul tells us of the Church of Corinth, that there were "contentions among them" (1 Cor. i. 11); and, again, that there were "schisms."—xi. 18. Nay, there were even "false apostles," claiming their miraculous powers as the true had passed from the earth.—2 Cor. xi. 13. Many had "erred concerning the faith."—1 Tim. vi. 21. There was even then a tendency to a veneration of angels, of such a kind as was condemned by the apostle.—Col. ii. 18. Thus, too, the whole Church of the Colossians was censured for paying an undue regard to festivals and ordinances, "which things have, indeed, a show of wisdom in superstition and humility, and not sparing the body, not in any honour to the filling of the flesh."—Col. ii. 20 and 23. The Church of the Galatians is similarly censured for laying too much stress on the "observance of days and months, and times and years" (Gal. iv. 10), and at the same time receives a general rebuke for its lapse from the truth; "O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?" (iii. 1.) Speaking of the great apostasy which, at some period of the world's history, was to overshadow the whole of Christendom, St. Paul expressly tells us that the seeds were already then sown—"for the mystery of iniquity already worketh."—2 Thess. ii. 7.

* All the verses cited in this article are taken from the Douay Translation.

Now, on these passages, as well as on those we are about to cite, the remark is too obvious to require any argument, that the presence of living infallible guides was insufficient to prevent errors insinuating themselves into Christianity; yet the great *desirableness*—as it appears to human reason—of such an effect, is the chief argument with Roman Catholics for assuming the *existence* of such an authority; and there is moreover this distinction, that, while the presence of several Apostles in the first ages supplied many and unquestioned tribunals of infallible reference, the Roman Catholic Church does not claim more than one, and cannot point out where exactly that is to be found. What, therefore, the Apostles failed to accomplish, it can hardly hope to achieve; and what then becomes of the common argument in favour of the existence of such an infallible tribunal, from its supposed efficacy? We should also observe, that the Apostles, while reproving the Churches for their errors, do not condemn them as thereby hopelessly cut off from the body of the visible Church.

But if such errors could take root, in the lifetime of the Apostles, we might naturally expect a far greater number to prevail in after ages, when deprived of the light of these living oracles. Accordingly, we read many prophetic warnings, that such would indeed be the case. Some of these are spoken of individuals, some of great numbers, some of entire churches, while some are specially directed to the Clergy or teachers. St. Paul, in his affecting address at Ephesus to the assembled "ancients of the Church," warns them that "of their own selves should arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—Acts xx. 17 and 30. So St. Peter tells us—"There shall be amongst you lying teachers, who shall bring in sects of perdition."—2 Peter ii. 1 and 2. And he adds, what would seem to indicate the probable extent of their success, "and many shall follow their riotousness, through whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." In the "latter times" we learn that such errors were to spread to an alarming extent—"Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, erring and driving into error."—2 Tim. iii. 1 and 13. And similar language is found in St. Jude, 18 and 19. We need not cite St. Paul's rebuke to the whole Church of the Corinthians, who grossly distorted so important a doctrine as that of the Eucharist. Nor is his language addressed to the Church of Rome itself, that of overweening confidence, but rather of solemn warning against her possible fall from truth. "Thou standest by faith; be not high-minded, but fear. For if God hath not spared the natural branches, fear lest perhaps he also spare not thee." "See then . . . the goodness of God, if thou abide in goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."—Rom. xi. 20 and 22. We need only refer to the similar tone of solemn warning addressed to entire Churches of Asia in the Apocalypse, particularly those of Pergamus, Thyatira, and Laodicea.—Apoc. ii. 14 and 20, and iii. 16.

We have purposely reserved the lessons which we think are meant to be taught in the remaining chapters of the Apocalypse, both because we consider them of peculiar importance, and because we are anxious not to have our meaning misunderstood. These lofty and mysterious prophecies have been so variously interpreted in their details, and have been applied so often in a manner likely most keenly to wound the feelings of Roman Catholics, that they are too apt to turn from them as either unintelligible or dangerous. We are not about to launch into such tangled disputations; we are rather anxious to draw from the sacred text the inferences that seem designed by its inspired writer to have been prominently taught us from the parts, that all may agree in considering as sufficiently clear. And, we may remark, that this is a portion of Scripture which Roman Catholics are peculiarly at liberty to study for themselves; for their Church has never made any authoritative interpretation of it, and any explanations, therefore, that individuals may adopt cannot be a presumptuous exercise of their private judgment, as their authoritative guide has as yet furnished no other to them. Their tenets do not bind them to wholly refrain from interpreting for themselves, but only from doing so contrary to the teaching of their Church.

Now, the first thing that will strike as extraordinary those who look on this book as too dark and enigmatical for general readings is, that it itself states the very reverse. It opens with the emphatic declaration—"Blessed is he that readeth and heareth the words of this prophecy."—Apoc. i. 3.

It repeats almost the same words towards its close (xxii. 9), and concludes with a solemn denunciation that shows the importance of its every line. "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life" (xxii. 19).

It is plain, therefore, that there is some peculiar blessing or advantage in religious knowledge, to be gained by the study of this book, and as it cannot be *wholly* from those passages that are but dimly guessed at, through the purposely obscure language of prophecy, it must be derived principally from those striking features which all who read carefully can gather from its more obvious portions. We shall endeavour, then, shortly to see what these are, and what are the lessons they inculcate.

Now, Roman Catholic commentators differ as to whether its prophecies are already principally fulfilled, or still remain principally future; but few of any side doubt that it is meant to give a prophetic sketch of the then known world (*ἡ γῆ*), the then empire of Rome, and that portion of the earth which has since been almost synonymous with Christendom, and within whose limits the struggles and doctrines of the Church visible, of Christianity itself, have been mainly decided. It comprehends the most striking epochs from its establishment to its final consummation at the close of the world.

In all this history, amid the religious ruin it so forcibly describes, we should naturally expect some mention of a mighty, infallible, visible, ecclesiastical establishment, preserving the majority of mankind in constant truth, if indeed any such were to so exist. Its mere silence would be very significant; the omission to point out so obvious and secure a refuge from perplexity and error, looks as if none such were known to the inspired writer. And, accordingly, how different is the picture actually drawn! It consists of a series of woes inflicted by Providence on Christendom, ever repeated and recurring, war, desolation, pestilence, and famine, which are throughout tacitly presumed to be sent by the Almighty as scourges to chastise the errors of the vast majority. There is hardly a chapter which tells of these terrible visitations that does not assume that the greater part of men are sunk in depravity as well as falsity of doctrine. The true believers, on the contrary, are described as few, as persecuted for ages, as often hid from the eyes of men, and as even at times so completely overwhelmed as to leave God without a witness upon earth.

In the limits of this article it would be impossible to follow out the whole train of this history, dark in its particular references, but clear in this general result. But one or two passages will especially illustrate our meaning. The period of 1260 days is repeatedly mentioned, both here and in the confessedly parallel prophecies of Daniel, during which a great heretic power should be predominant. In the prophet Daniel, as in many other prophetic writers, the day is conceded to mean a literal year, and it is difficult not to attach the same meaning to the word here. This at once gives us a vast period, during which the dominant Church was to be as heretic.* The true believers are described as "two witnesses" (the least number that could testify to any fact in the Jewish law), and as "clothed in sackcloth," the emblem of suffering.—Apoc. xi. 3. Even these two are finally overcome and destroyed (xi. 7). This persecuting power that has thus destroyed them will, for the 1260 year-days, be dominant and triumphant. "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation" (xiii. 7). So, too, we find the Church of God, as the note in the Douay Bible correctly explains the emblem of the "woman" (c. xii. 1.), described as driven into "the wilderness" (xii. 6 and 14), where she is hid during these 1260 year-days from persecution. There may, indeed, be true servants of God during that time, but they do not form the visible Church, or its ecclesiastical power. The avenging angel was to smite mankind with successive chastisements, but man's blindness and crime was to obstinately continue; "and the rest of the men, who were not slain by the plagues, did not do penance from the works of their hands"—ix. 20.

Now, let any one candidly read not only these few passages, but the entire history of the Church, as it was un-

* It is worth observing, to meet a surmise that might arise in the minds of our Roman Catholic readers, that no one sign of this Mystic Babylon can be made to agree with the characteristics of Protestantism.

folded to the prophetic gaze of St. John, and see if he can discover any sign of a perfect, continuous, never-ceasing, never-erring, visible Church establishment, numbering the greater part of the inhabitants of Christendom amongst its followers, and at some periods apparently embracing the whole—a glory which the Church of Rome alone ventures to claim for herself; or does not he rather read that truth and purity were to be exceptions amid general and grave error, ever persecuted, and for some time overwhelmed, falsehood ruling the religious world for ages, and, for a season, God's truth left without a witness with the courage or the power to proclaim it?

This is the lesson, we think, which is most palpably taught, and which carries the promised blessing to those who learn it; one that must have brought consolation to the bosoms of many, who found themselves often alone, amid a world of error. As the New Testament tells us, had already begun to happen in the days of the Apostles, the Apocalypse reveals the continuance and growth of the like mixed system of good and evil, in which for long the evil should predominate, till the second coming of Christ should effect a retributive change. And so, too, during the long centuries past—as, perhaps, for many still to come—we find the Church visible foreshadowed in the sacred book, as history in fact records the event, as ever stricken with punishments, swept by the fierce Goths and savage Hun, exhausted by its struggles with the Saracen and the Turk, and prostrate beneath successive conquerors, the unconscious instruments of God's wrath. Assuredly, not yet have been fulfilled those prophecies, often triumphantly quoted by our Roman Catholic correspondents, in which it is described as perfect in righteousness, as free from sin, as resting in tranquillity and peace, when wars and tribulations shall have passed away. Yet, it is these prophecies, and these alone, which ever speak of the visible Church as perfect in doctrine, and free from error. They, however, supply us with an obvious test: WHEN SIN IS BANISHED, ERROR WILL DISAPPEAR—but not till then; when a Church of men can show itself impeccable, it may then claim to be infallible. Meanwhile, revelation agrees with history in showing that perfection in either way has not, yet at least, been attained by the Church, as it is seen by the eye of man.

DECRETAL EPISTLES.—No. IV.

HOW THE FORGED EPISTLES WERE USED IN THE CANON LAW.

WE gave in our last number, the labours of the Popes of the ninth century in establishing the forged Decretals as the law of the Church. We did not proceed beyond Pope Adrian II. The succeeding Popes no longer laboured to establish the forgery: that was now accomplished, and they thought only how they could use the vast powers which forgery had acquired.

Thus Pope Sylvester II. restores Arnulphus to the archbishopric of Rheims, of which he had been deprived for his crimes; not from any consideration of the welfare of the Church, but "that Peter may have free power of loosing, and that the dignity of the Roman glory may shine forth everywhere; wherefore, we have thought it fit to assist you, Arnulphus, Archbishop of Rheims, deprived, for whatever excesses, of your pontifical dignity." (1) The Pope goes on to restore him to all his honours, making no stipulation whatever for his repentance or his absolution; but saying, "Let our authority protect you upon every side, EVEN THOUGH GUILT OF CONSCIENCE OPRESS YOU!" (2) As if it were necessary to the dominion which falsehood had established, that it should triumph, not only over public decency and virtue, but over the voice of God in the conscience of man! And, to crown all, Pope Sylvester concludes with pronouncing anathema against any succeeding Pope who should alter this decree! (3)—a worthy use of power so acquired.

And the eloquence of those Popes, and its application, may be judged of from this specimen, taken from the same Pope's first epistle to Azolinus, Bishop of Leon:—"O Juda, magistri positionem innovans, et Pontificalem gloriam nostris temporibus deturpans!"

Some Popes of the next ages deserve more notice, and may receive it from us hereafter; but our present subject is too extensive to let us dwell on any individual Popes. We undertook to show, in this number, how the forged Epistles and councils were THENCEFORWARD continued and maintained as the laws of the Church of Rome.

For this purpose we take the book, called "The Decretum of Gratian."

This Gratian was a monk, of the monastery of St. Felix, in Bononia, and he published this book in the year 1151. It is a vast collection of everything that he could find, having the force of law or the weight of authority in the Church. Fathers, councils, formularies, Papal decrees, and epistles—all are collected here, not from the original writers, but from the various compilations which Gra-

tian found in use at that time as books of Church law. The variety and contradictions of those former collections were found so inconvenient, that Gratian resolved to bring them all together in one book; and this book had such success, that it became the standard work on the law of the Roman Church.

It has been disputed whether this book was confirmed and authorized by the Pope when it came out. Two ancient authors of credit, Trithemius and Machiavel, say that it was so authorized; others deny it. We think that the latter are correct, and that the book was not authorized by the Pope. Still, the fact is confessed, that it was universally adopted in all the courts of the Roman Church. Our witness is Archbishop Devoti, Secretary to Pope Pius VII., the latest Roman writer on Canon law. Devoti wished to allow this Decretum of Gratian as little authority as possible, because it quotes the forgeries; yet he confesses that "scarcely had the work of Gratian come forth into light, than it was held in such esteem by all, that it was read publicly in the schools (of law), and produced in court as part of the common law." (4) If we consider the law books received in our own courts of law, we may easily understand how this might happen to a book not authorized by law. No book has greater authority in British courts of law than "Coke upon Littleton;" yet that book never was confirmed by act of parliament, nor by any law. Yet all courts receive that book as the law of the land, not because Sir Edward Coke had any authority to make laws, but because he gave the best and most accurate statement of the things that were law before he wrote his book. It was precisely the same with Gratian; he collected everything which he found already admitted as law in the Papal courts, and therefore the Papal courts universally adopted his book as the standard work on their law. Carrying out this object, Gratian adopted the forged Decretals into his collection, because he found them already acknowledged in the Roman courts as the law of the Roman Church. Those Decretals did not become law, because he put them in his book; but he put them in his book because he found them law already. We admit the statement of Devoti (p. 376) "concerning the authority of the Decretum (of Gratian); it is to be thus held, that all things which are related in it have the same force as if they were viewed apart from the Decretum. Therefore, whatever force the places of Holy Scripture, the decrees of Popes and of General Councils have by their own quality and nature, the same they retain in the Decretum; but the others, by being put into the Decretum, do not obtain that authority which they have not of themselves." (5)

It follows from this, that genuine Decretals of Popes in the Decretum, are still law, but forged Decretals in the Decretum are not law, merely because they are found in it. It follows, also, that the forged Decretals, which are in the Decretum of Gratian, while they were believed to be genuine, were universally regarded as the laws of the Church.

So the fact stands thus; in the year 1151, Gratian found the forged Epistles of the Popes universally received in the Papal courts as the law of the Roman Church; Gratian adopted them as such, and the Roman courts adopted his book; and, for at least FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY YEARS AFTER (as we shall presently prove), and probably some time longer, no one ever doubted that these forged Epistles were genuine, or ever questioned that they were a part of the law of the Roman Church!

We shall now show briefly to what extent, and with what object, the forged Decretal Epistles figured in the Decretum of Gratian.

We confine ourselves (for reasons given in our former numbers) to the Decretal Epistles of the Popes of the first 400 years, of which we gave a list in our first number, printed in the CATHOLIC LAYMAN, December, 1853.

Our readers will remember that we showed in that list that there are 84 forged Epistles for those 400 years, and 23 epistles commonly reputed genuine.

Of the 84 forgeries, Gratian quotes 65.

Of the 23 called genuine, Gratian quotes ONLY ONE, and that one, if not forged, is most probably "cooked."

Our readers may remember what we said in our first number, that while the forged Epistles give just what Roman Catholics wish to find in the early ages, the genuine Epistles of those ages do not give any support to the Papacy. Hence, they may understand why Gratian quotes so many of the forged, and so few of the genuine.

But to come to particulars: this book, the Decretum, is divided into larger divisions (which in modern days would be called chapters), and these are subdivided into smaller divisions, called "canons."

Of these canons, THREE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOUR are taken from the Decretal Epistles of the first 400 years.

Of these three hundred and twenty-four, THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN are forgeries, ONLY ELEVEN genuine; if, indeed, that one Epistle be really genuine.

We confine ourselves to our list of the 400 years. Were we to take in the forgeries of later Popes, and the number of passages from books that were never written by the authors whose names they bear, we should, perhaps, double the number.

But, compare these THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN forged canons, with the number of canons which Gratian took from the Scriptures—from the Old Testament, THIRTEEN; from the New Testament, just NINE.

Each canon is to prove some point in the law of the Church of Rome; whereby our readers may see that it was then, as it is now, much easier to prove the papal system from lying stories, than to prove it from the Word of God.

Now, let us see what did Gratian use these forgeries to prove.

In Distinctions (or, as we might call them, chapters) XXI. and XXII. he brings forward proofs for the supremacy of Rome. In Dist. XXI. can. 2, he quotes the forged Epistle of Anacletus. "..... the sacerdotal order began from Peter, because the Pontificate in the Church of Christ was given to him first....." (6)

In canon 3 he quotes the Decree of Gelasius about approved and apocryphal books, as follows—"..... the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church was set over the other Churches by no synodical decrees, but obtained the primacy by the evangelical voice of our Lord and Saviour....." (7)

Again, in Dist. XXII., canon 2, he quotes the forged Epistle of Anacletus (which we gave in our last number). "The Holy Roman and Apostolic Church obtained the primacy and pre-eminence over all Churches, not from the apostles, but from the Lord himself, our Saviour....."

Again, in Dist. XXIII., canon 3, Gratian quotes St. Cyprian, saying—"he who deserts the See of Peter, on which the Church is founded, let him not trust that he is in the Church." (8) But these words were never written by St. Cyprian; they were put into his writings by the forgers many centuries after his death.

As far as we have been able to find, these are all the proofs which Gratian brings from the first eight centuries in support of the supremacy by divine right, of the Roman Church. And they are all forgeries. All his other proofs for it are taken from Popes or other writers of the ninth and following centuries.

Here we have the confirmation of our opinion, which we hope yet to prove still further, that the supremacy by divine right originated from the forged Decretals of the ninth century, and that all former Popes and writers were ignorant of it.

In support of the authority of the forged Decretals, Gratian, or some one for him, transcribes, Dist. XIX. c. 1, that whole argument of Pope Nicolas I. (which we gave at the end of No. II., January 1854, p. 4, col. 1), in which Pope Nicolas insists on people receiving the Decretal Epistles, written in the times of pagan persecution; which it is impossible to apply to any but the forged decretals.

For the divine inspiration of the Pope's decrees, Gratian (Dist. XXI. canon 7) produced that passage of Pope Nicolas (given in our second number, January 1854, p. 3, col. 1), in which Pope Nicolas produces the forged story about Pope Marcellinus as being given by divine inspiration.

But Gratian brings another proof (Dist. xix., canon 6) for the divine inspiration of the Pope's decrees, which deserves attention. This canon has a heading to it—"The Decretal Epistles are to be reckoned in among the CANONICAL SCRIPTURES!" The canon itself consists of a passage which St. Augustine wrote about the Holy Scripture itself, which passage Gratian altered, so that it might apply to the Decretal Epistles of Popes!

Four hundred and thirty years after, this passage was altered to run as St. Augustine wrote it, by correctors whom we shall speak of presently, but those correctors left the heading as Gratian wrote it!

That the Pope only has the right of calling councils, Gratian proves (Dist. xvii., Canons 1, 2, 3, 5) from the Decretal Epistles of Pope Marcellus, Pope Julius I., Pope Damasus, and Pope Pelagius II.—all forgeries.

That the sacrifice of the mass is a propitiatory sacrifice for the taking away of sin, Gratian proves (de Consecr. Dist. ii., Canon 7) from a Decretal Epistle of Pope Julius I., "every crime and sin is blotted out by these sacrifices offered to God;" (9) and also from Pope Alexander (Canon 8)—"nothing can effect more in sacrifices than the body and blood of Christ, nor is any oblation more powerful than this, but this excels all....." (10) Both these Epistles are acknowledged forgeries.

For the ceremonies and rules to be observed at the mass, many of which are very like those now observed, Gratian gives canons, many taken from the forgeries; as from Clement (de Consecr. Dist. i., Canon 14). Clement again, Canon 39; Sixtus, Canon 41; Stephen, Canon 42; Sylves-

(1) Ut Potro solvendi libera sit potestas, et Romanæ gloriæ ubique falgat dignitas. Quapropter tibi Arnulpho Remensi archiepiscopo, quibusdam excessibus pontificali honore privato, subvertente dignum duximus. Ep. 2 to Arnulphus.—Labbe and Com., vol. ix., p. 774.

(2) Nostra te ubique auctoritas muniat, etiam si conscientie reatus apparet.—Same epistle.

(3) Statuentes apostolica censura sub divini obtestatione iudicii, et anathematis interdictione, ut nulli unquam nostrorum successorum pontificum, vel alie quilibet magnæ parvæque persone, hoc nostrum privilegium infringere liceat.—Same epistle.

(4) Vix Gratiani opus in hæc proficit, tanto ab omnibus in pretio habitum est, ut in scholis publicè lægeretur, atque in Foro tanquam pars communis juris proponeretur.—Devoti, Jus Canonieum, ed. Rom., 1837, vol. i., p. 373.

(5) De auctoritate Decreti sic habendum est: omnia que in eo referuntur, vix eandem habent, ac si seorsum a Decreto apostolorum. Inque loca sacra Scriptura, decreta Summorum Pontificum, et generalium conciliorum, quam sua indole et natura vim habent, eandem in Decreto retinent; cetera vero auctoritatem, qua per se erant, in Decretum translatam consequuntur.—Devoti, Jus Canonieum, vol. i., p. 376.

(6) A Petro Sacerdotalis cepit ordo, quia ipsi primo pontificatus in ecclesia Christi datus est.

(7) Romana, Catholica et Apostolica Ecclesia nullis synodical constitutis ceteris ecclesiis prelatæ est, sed evangelica voce Domini et Salvatoris nostri Primitum obtinuit.

(8) Qui Cathedrali Petri super quædam fundata est Ecclesia, deservit, in Ecclesia se esse non confidat.

(9) Omne crimen atque peccatum oblatis Deo sacrificiis deletatur.

(10) Nihil in sacrificiis majus esse potest, quam corpus et sanguis Christi, nec ulla oblatio hac potior est, sed hæc omnes præcellit.